



San Diego City Attorney

MICHAEL J. AGUIRRE

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 12, 2008

Communications Division: (619) 235-5725

1994 STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES LETTER GAVE GREEN LIGHT FOR CITY TO PURSUE DRINKING WATER FROM WASTEWATER REPURIFICATION PROJECT

San Diego, CA—As the City's Water Department prepares this month to brief the City Council about the cost of a demonstration project which would recycle wastewater into a new source of drinking water, City Attorney Michael Aguirre released a 1994 letter from the State Department of Health Services that gave the City tentative approval to go forward with a similar plan.

The recycling process, known then as Water Repurification, would direct wastewater to the North City Water Reclamation plant where it would be treated to drinking water quality. The water then would be introduced into the San Vicente Reservoir where it would remain for a year before being treated again and then distributed to water customers.

The Department of Health Services concluded the project would not compromise the quality of drinking water from the San Vicente Reservoir, and was a "logical extension" of California's water resources management strategy. However, the City Council abruptly stopped the project in 1999.

"Had this program moved forward nine years ago, it would be up and running today, insulating us from the water shortages that are likely to come," said City Attorney Michael Aguirre.

In 2004, a new City Council lifted the ban when it requested that the City study all aspects of water reuse. A lawsuit challenging the legality of the study was successfully defended by the City Attorney's Office and the Water Reuse Study was subsequently released in 2006.

Most recently, on December 3, 2007, the City Council narrowly voted to override the veto of Mayor Jerry Sanders, and directed the Mayor to move forward with a similar wastewater recycling demonstration project now called Indirect Potable Reuse.

The 2006 Water Reuse Study is available on the City's website. The study concludes the most economical way to utilize the full capacity of the North City Water Reclamation Plant is to pursue Indirect Potable Reuse.

(MORE)

According to the 1997 *Strategic Plan for Water Supply*, 10% of the City's drinking water supply was to come from wastewater treated at the North City Water Reclamation Plant.

The City imports 90 percent of its water. Last week, the California Fish and Game Commission concluded that the Longfin Smelt is being threatened in the same manner as the Delta Smelt. To protect the Longfin Smelt, the pumps that send water south from the Delta may have to be shut down even longer, meaning even less water for Southern California.

Today, the Scripps Institute of Oceanography released a study which concluded that there is a 50 per cent chance that Lake Mead could go dry by 2021. Along with Lake Powell, which straddles the border between Arizona and Utah, Lake Meade supplies approximately 8 million people in the cities of Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and San Diego with water.

###